

CONTROLLER BY THE MANIPULATION OF VIRTUAL OBJECTS
ON A MULTI-CONTACT TACTILE SCREEN

[0001] The present invention relates to the area of musical controllers.

[0002] The present invention relates more particularly to a man-machine interface permitting, e.g., the control of music software or of a controller by a multi-contact tactile screen with the manipulation of virtual objects.

[0003] The prior art already contains manual-type software controllers. They are, e.g., potentiometers that can be manipulated by the user in the form of a console and control the different functions of music software. Such a console forms, e.g., the subject matter of PCT application WO 01/69399.

[0004] The disadvantage of this type of controller is that they are not very ergonomic for an efficient manipulation of software.

[0005] The solution proposed by the present invention is to implement a tactile screen for the manipulation of and the access to software functions.

[0006] In the area of tactile controllers the prior art already contains in PCT application WO 03/041006 or US 6,570,078 musical controllers with tactile control on a matrix sensor. The technologies described in these documents permit a tactile control of the multi-contact type in which all the fingers can intervene for the control of software.

[0007] However, these documents do not propose a visual return of the manipulations since the different matrix sensors are of the opaque type.

[0008] The prior art contains in American patent application US 2002/005108 (Lester Franck Ludwig) "*Tactile, Visual and Array Controllers for Real-Time Control of Music Signal Processing, Mixing, Video and Lighting*" a system and a process for controlling in real time

signal processors, synthesizers, musical instruments, MIDI processors, lights, video, and special effects during presentations, recordings or in compositional environments using images derived from tactile sensors, from matrices of pressure sensors, from matrices of optical transducers, from matrices of chemical sensors, matrices of body sensors and from digital processes. The invention of this American patent application furnishes touchpads, matrices of pressure sensors and matrices of body sensors as interfaces of tactile control, video cameras and matrices of light sensors such as optical transducers, matrices of chemical sensors and of other apparatuses for generating digital images from processes on computers or from digital simulations. The tactile transducers can be arranged on the keys of conventional instruments, be attached to existing instruments or also be used to create new instruments or new controllers. The matrices of chemical sensors and the other apparatuses for generating digital images from computer processes or from digital simulations can be used to observe or simulate natural physical phenomena such as environmental conditions or self-organizing process behaviors. Matrices of scalars or of vectors are processed in order to extract pattern limits, geometric properties of pixels within limits (geometric center, weighted moments, etc.) and information derived from a higher level (direction of rotation, segmented regions, pattern classification, syntax, grammars, sequences, etc.) that are used to create control signals to external video and visual equipment and for control or even algorithms. This invention also allows MIDI and non-MIDI control signals to be furnished.

[0009] This American patent application does not propose a visual return of manipulations. This American patent application does not mention a command law. Finally, this patent application does not propose technical solutions to the masking phenomena that intervene when

several figures are aligned or placed in an orthogonal manner on the sensor. The resolution of these problems is indispensable for realizing a multi-contact tactile sensor.

[0010] The prior art also contains in American patent US 5,027,689 (Yamaha) “*Musical Tone Generating Apparatus*” an apparatus for generating musical sounds. This apparatus comprises a device for generating positional information for generating information about the position of musical instruments (PS) as values of plane coordinates. This information (PS) is stored in a memory device or determined in a selective manner by a manual operation. The apparatus also comprises a device for the conversion of information for converting the information (PS) into information for controlling parameters of musical sounds (PD). This PD control information controls the source signals of musical sounds (S11, S12 and S13) for generating a sound field corresponding to the position of musical instruments arranged on a stage. This allows an operator to verify the positions of musical instruments on a stage, thus supplying the sensation of being in a true live performance.

[0011] This American patent mentions a multi-contact but it is only two contacts on an axis and not in Cartesian coordinates. The apparatus of this American patent only functions linearly for the multipoint option and does not allow tracking (following of trajectory). Moreover, the apparatus of this American patent requires a plurality of sensors specific to each of the instruments whereas the present invention relates to a generic sensor.

[0012] The prior art or also contains a solution of the musical controller type in the form of a tactile screen with visual return of the manipulated objects by US patent 5, 559, 301. However, this patent describes predefined objects (essentially of the sliders type and circular potentiometer type). These object types are rather limiting and can prove to be not very ergonomic for special manipulations. Moreover, the acquisition mode described in this patent is not in real time. In

fact, an icon must first be activated by a first contact with a finger, then the manipulated object, and the values are only updated after the icon has been released. This solution does not allow a management in real time of the parameters associated with the object. Finally, the tactile sensor used in this patent is a “mono-contact” sensor that permits the acquisition, e.g., only for a single finger and therefore the control of a single object at a time. This characteristic is very limiting for an efficient manipulation of objects.

[0013] In all the following the term “multi-contact” defines a tactile sensor that allows the acquisition of contact zones of several fingers at a time in contrast to “mono-contact” sensors that only allow the acquisition for a single finger or for a stylus as, e.g., in the preceding patent US 5, 559, 301.

[0014] The present invention has the problem of rectifying the disadvantages of the prior art by proposing a screen for multi-contact tactile musical control with visual return of the different actions of the user on parameterable objects.

[0015] In order to do this the present invention is of the type described above and is remarkable in its broadest meaning in that it concerns a process for the control of computerized equipment by a device comprising a multi-contact bidimensional sensor for the acquisition of tactile information as well as comprises calculating means generating command signals as a function of this tactile information, characterized in that it comprises a stage for the generation of graphical objects on a screen placed under a transparent multi-contact tactile sensor, each of which graphical objects is associated with at least one specific processing law, that the sensor delivers during each acquisition phase a plurality of tactile information, and that each piece of this tactile information forms the object of a specific processing determined by its localization relative to the position of one of these graphical objects.

[0016] The processings preferably comprise a bounding zone detection of the contact zone of an object with the tactile sensor.

[0017] The processings advantageously comprise a barycenter detection.

[0018] It preferably comprises stages for the refreshing of graphical objects as a function of the processings carried out during at least one previous acquisition stage.

[0019] According to an embodiment it comprises a stage for editing graphical objects consisting in generating a graphical representation from a library of graphical components and functions and in determining an associated processing law.

[0020] The acquisition frequency of the tactile information is preferably greater than 50 Hz.

[0021] The present invention also concerns a device for the control of a computerized piece of equipment comprising a multi-contact bidimensional sensor for the acquisition of tactile information, characterized in that it furthermore comprises a viewing screen arranged under the bidimensional tactile sensor, as well as a memory for recording graphical objects that are each associated with at least one processing law, and a local calculator for analyzing the position of acquired tactile information and the application of a processing law as a function of this position relative to the position of the graphical objects.

[0022] Moreover, it is preferably connected to a hub (multi-socket network) for forming a network of controllers.

[0023] This multi-contact bidimensional tactile sensor is advantageously a resistive tile.

[0024] Furthermore, this device preferably comprises a network output suitable for receiving a network cable.

[0025] The invention will be better understood with the aid of the following description given below solely by way of explanation of an embodiment of the invention with reference made to the attached figures in which:

Figure 1A is a functional diagram of the controller in accordance with the invention.

Figure 1B represents the structure of the controller associated with the functional diagram of the invention.

Figure 1C represents the functional diagram of the different stages of the processes for the acquisition of data coming from the sensor, of the creation of cursors associated with the different fingers, of the interaction with the graphical objects and of the generation of control messages.

Figure 2A is a description of the tactile matrix sensor.

Figure 2B describes the first stage of the scanning functioning of the sensor in order to obtain the multi-contact information.

Figures 2C, 2E and 2F explain the resolution of problems of orthogonality.

Figure 2D is a functional diagram of the capture interface.

The series of figures 3A to 3F explain the stages for the creation of cursors, filtering, calculation of barycenter, mapping and of the control of graphical objects.

Figures 4, 5 represent different examples of graphical objects.

Figures 6 to 10 represent different examples of combinations of graphical objects on the controller.

Figure 11 illustrates the network use of the controller associated with the computer of the user.

[0026] In all of the following the control is performed on a computerized piece of equipment that can be, e.g., a music software, a controller, audiovisual equipment or multimedia equipment.

[0027] As figures 1A, 1B and more precisely 2A illustrate, the first basic element of the present invention is the matrix sensor 101 necessary for the acquisition (multi-contact manipulations) with the aid of a capture interface 102. The sensor can be divided, if necessary, into several parts in order to accelerate the capture, each part being scanned simultaneously.

[0028] The general principle is to create as many cursors (such as a mouse cursor) as there are zones detected on the sensor and to follow their developments in time.

[0029] When the user removes his fingers from the sensor the associated cursors are destroyed.

[0030] In this manner the position and the development of several fingers are captured simultaneously on the sensor. This is a multi-contact capture that is quite innovative for this type of controller.

[0031] The sensor used for the embodiment of the invention is a resistive tactile matrix tile of a known type.

[0032] Resistive tactile matrix tiles are composed of 2 superposed faces on which tracks of ITO (indium tin oxide), that is a translucent conductive material, are organized. The tracks are laid out in lines on the upper layer and in columns on the lower layer, forming a matrix (cf. Figure 2A).

[0033] The two conductive layers are insulated from one another by spacing braces. The intersection of the line with the column forms a contact point. When a finger is placed on the tile a column or columns situated on the upper layer are put in contact with a line or line situated on the lower layer, thus creating one or several contact points (cf. Figure 2B).

[0034] A variant of the invention advantageously consists in replacing the braces by a transparent resistive material (e.g., a conductive polymer) whose resistance varies as a function of the pressure, which resistance drops if a sufficient pressure force is exerted. In this manner it would also be possible to extract the pressure exerted on the surface by performing a resistance measurement at each line-column intersection.

[0035] As concerns the musical or audiovisual use of these tiles, it is imperative to measure the activity of a finger with a maximum latency of 20 ms.

[0036] The state of the tile is measured at least 100 times per second, which tile can be divided into several zones in order to perform a parallel processing on these zones.

[0037] Thus, according to the invention the sampling frequency of the tile is at least 100 Hz.

[0038] Another basic element is the electronic device for scanning the tactile tile that allows the simultaneous detection of several contact points on the matrix sensor. In fact, the known methods of acquisitions for this type of sensors do not allow the detection of several simultaneous contact points.

[0039] The methods known in the past do not allow the problems illustrated by figure 2C to be solved.

[0040] If a simultaneous measurement of all the lines is performed while feeding a column, problems of orthogonality arise. Contact point No. 1 will mask contact point No. 2. Likewise, if a line is measured when all the columns are fed, contact point No. 2 is masked by contact point No. 1. The solution proposed for solving this problem consists in performing a sequential scanning of the sensor.

[0041] The columns are fed, e.g., at 5V in turn and the level of the lines (high or low level) measured sequentially.

[0042] When one of the columns is placed under voltage the others are in high impedance in order to prevent the propagation of current into the latter.

[0043] Thus, column 1 is fed at first while the other columns are in high impedance.

[0044] The lines are measured sequentially, that is, one after the other. The value on the first line is read initially while all the other lines are connected to ground. Then, line 1 is connected to ground and the value on line 2 is read and so forth until the value of all the lines has been read.

[0045] Column 1 then passes into the high impedance state and column 2 is fed. The reading of the state of each of the lines recommences.

[0046] The scanning is performed in this manner up to the last column.

[0047] As the goal is to form a multi-contact tile, the total scanning of the matrix is carried out at an elevated frequency in order to obtain the value of each of the intersection points of the tile several times per second.

[0048] The device permitting the acquisition of the tile data is illustrated in figure 2D, representing the algorithm of the acquisition of a tile comprising 100 lines (L) and 135 columns (C).

[0049] Certain problems in the masking of a point by one or several other points can appear.

[0050] In fact, the resistance of the transparent material (ITO) composing the columns and the lines increases proportionately to the length of the tracks. Thus, the potential measured at the lower left corner of the sensor will be greater than the potential measured at the upper right corner.

[0051] In figures 2E and 2F the cloud of points absorbs a large part of the electrical potential of the fed column. The potential measured at the isolated point is therefore too low to be detected.

[0052] The solution to this problem consists in using a voltage comparator piloted digitally at the output of the line in order to determine whether the tension observed is sufficient for being considered as resulting from the action of a finger on the tactile tile. The reference value of the comparator (comparison threshold) is decremented at each line measure. Thus, the comparison values of the last lines are lower than those of the first lines, which allows the contact point located at the lower left or the upper right to be detected in the same manner.

[0053] Thus, e.g., the complete sampling of the tile is performed at least 100 times per second for the columns and the lines.

[0054] The data from capture interface 102 thus form an image representative of the totality of the sensor. This image is placed in memory so that a program can proceed to the filtering, the detection of the fingers and to the creation of the cursors. Refer for this effect to figure 1.

[0055] The filtering phase illustrated by figure 3B consists in eliminating the noise that might be generated by the acquisition interface or the sensor itself. It is considered that only the clouds of several contact points can correspond to the pressure of a finger. Therefore, a bounding zone detection is carried out in order to eliminate isolated contact points.

[0056] The following stage consists in associating a cursor with each support point (figure 3C). To this end the barycenter of each bounding zone is calculated. When a finger is released the corresponding cursor is freed.

[0057] The program executed locally by the main processor allows these cursors to be associated with graphical objects that are displayed on screen 105 in order to manipulate them. At the same time the local program uses these cursors for generating control messages addressed to the host computer or the controlled apparatus.

[0058] Furthermore, the program comprises a simulator of the physical models allowing the modification of the interaction laws between the cursors and the graphical objects. Different physical models can be employed: spring-loaded system, vibration of a string, management of collisions, the law of gravity, electromagnetic field.

[0059] The program considers the positioning of the cursors and on which graphical object each is located. A specific processing is supplied to the data coming from the sensor as a function of the object considered. For example, a pressure measurement (corresponding to a development of the spot made by the finger on the tactile tile in a short interval of time) can be interpreted. Other parameters can be deduced as a function of the nature of the object: the acceleration, speed, trajectories, etc. Algorithms of recognition of form can also be applied in order to differentiate different fingers.

[0060] The main program 103 also transmits the data to be displayed on screen 105 to graphical interface 104. Moreover, this graphical interface is constituted by a graphical processor. This graphical processor is, e.g., of a known type. The latter can be constituted by primitive graphical functions allowing, e.g., the displaying of bitmap, of fonts of polygons and of figures in 2 and 3 dimensions, the vectorial design, the antialiasing, the texture mapping, the transparency and the interpolation of colors.

[0061] In this presentation of the invention the main program also comprises an analyzer of mathematical expressions that allows mathematical functions to be inputted and calculated in real time. These functions allow the values of any variable to be modified. For example, the coordinates (x, y) of a cursor inside an object can be considered as two variables comprised between 0 and 1. The expression analyzer allows an expression of the type " $x \cdot 1000 + 600$ " to be created in order to obtain a new variable whose value is comprised between 600 and 1600. The

variable obtained allows the control, e.g., of the frequency of an oscillator comprised between 600 and 1600 hertz.

[0062] The mathematical expressions can be applied to scalar values as well as to vectors.

[0063] The expression analyzer is a tool that allows real-time calculations to be performed on the variables of objects.

[0064] Local program 103 also performs a formatting of data in the form of messages for network port 106, that communicates it to the computer on which the computer applications are performed.

[0065] The network interface is, e.g., an Ethernet 10/100 baseT standard interface that communicates by packets with the protocol TCP/IP. It can also be a network interface of the wireless type.

[0066] It should be noted as illustrated in figure 11 that the Ethernet connection offers the user the possibility, by using a simple hub (multi-socket network), of indefinitely expanding his control apparatus by constituting a network of controllers in accordance with the invention.

[0067] The controller or controllers present in the network then communicate among themselves and with the host computer in the form of the reciprocal sending of messages.

[0068] Furthermore, the unit constituting the machine is fed by a battery (not shown) of a known type or by an AC adapter.

[0069] Finally, an interface editor 107 at the level of the computer of the user allows the interface, that is, the totality of the graphic objects displayed on screen 105, to be programmed in a graphical manner. In this embodiment of the invention the interfaces are themselves organized in scenes, that are higher hierarchical structures. In fact, each scene comprises several interfaces.

The user can interchange the interfaces with the aid of a button keyboard or a control pedal board connected to input-output port 109.

[0070] Another function of the interface editor is to assign the control data to the parameters that the user wishes to control.

[0071] The user has at his disposal, e.g., a library of parameterable graphical objects allowing the composition of different interfaces according to the application desired. Figures 4 and 5 represent different graphical objects placed at the disposition of the user.

[0072] They can be predefined and dedicated quite particularly to music or to the control of audiovisual equipment or computerized apparatuses. For example, a linear potentiometer 403, 404 is particularly adapted to control continuous parameters such as the volume of a sound signal, the frequency of a filter. A serrated wheel 401 can serve, e.g., to control the playing of an audio or video reader. The objects can also be freely developed with a development kit (SDK) of a known type 109. The development kit furnishes access to the primitive graphical functions of the controller.

[0073] Interface editor 107 thus allows the user to readily create personalized control interfaces. It is a software executed on the user's computer. It is composed of a main window representing the tactile surface of the tile on which graphical objects from a library of proposed objects can be placed. The manipulation and placing of objects on the surface are performed, e.g., with the mouse. The object placed on the window is displayed at the same time on the controller and the object is recorded in a memory of the controller. It can subsequently move or re-dimension the objects at its convenience.

[0074] In addition to the positioning of graphical objects on the main window, other secondary windows allow the regulation of different parameters inherent in the objects (graphical

properties, physical behavior). For example, a button 402 can also act as a switch or as a trigger. In the case of the trigger mode a pressure measurement can optionally be performed. Another example of a parameterable object is area 2D (503, 544) of which the principle consists in moving pawns inside a delimited zone. The number of pawns present in area 2D is a parameterable option. The area can be configured in uniplan mode, a mode in which the pawns enter into collision with each other, or multi-plan, a mode in which the pawns are placed on distinct superposed planes. Physical parameters can also be configured: the coefficient of friction of the pawns on the plane, the rebound and the attraction of the pawns on the edges and among themselves.

[0075] The editor also permits the objects present on the surface to be listed and the creation of functions and of variables with the expression analyzer.

[0076] Thus, the objects have by default a certain number of variables (x, y, z...) corresponding to their primitive axes. These variables are always comprised between 0 and 1 and vary in the form of 32-bit numbers with floating comma. The user must be able to “connect” these variables to other values more representative of what he desires to control. Thus, the expression analyzer furnishes the possibility of creating new variables with the aid of simple mathematical expressions. For example, a rectilinear potentiometer has a primitive axis that is x. If the user wishes to control the frequency of 500 to 2500 Hz he must create a variable $a=2000x+500$.

[0077] Status display options are also desired. They permit a visual control of the state of a parameter.

[0078] The further treatments to be applied to the objects at the level of the main calculating unit 103 by the manipulation on the tile are specific to each type of object.

[0079] In fact, a circular movement of the finger on a virtual linear potentiometer (403, 404) should not have an effect on the state of the potentiometer whereas it should modify the state in the case of a circular potentiometer 401. Likewise, certain objects can only take into account a single finger (the linear potentiometer, for example) at a time whereas others can accept the interaction of several fingers (keyboard, area 2D).

[0080] For example, the “area 2D” (503, 504) is a rectangular surface containing a certain number of pawns, each with its own position. The pawns can be moved by the user.

[0081] The principle is to put in place a physical system for the totality of the objects, that is, e.g., that the pawns moved by the user acquire a speed of inertia that they retain when the user lets them go; the pawns subjected in this manner to their own speed will rebound on the edges of “area 2D” and also rebound among themselves. Furthermore, they will be subjected to forces of attraction/repulsion on the edges and on the other pawns as well as to a coefficient of friction on the surface of area 2D for stopping the pawns at the end of a certain time. All these parameters will be parameterable.

[0082] Another variant of area 2D consists in applying a physical law of the “spring-loaded” type. A virtual rubber band is stretched between each cursor and each pawn. The user can modify the behavior of this object by configuring the friction and the interpolation factor. These properties can also be modified in real time with the aid of other objects.

[0083] Another example is the “Multislider” 501, a table of cursors whose numbers can be configured. The typical use is the controlling of a graphic equalizer or of a spectral envelope. The difference between a “multislider” and several simple juxtaposed linear potentiometers is that the totality of the cursors can be modified in a single touch by sliding the finger. The

multislider can also be used as a discrete string. For this, it is sufficient to apply to it the physical model of a string whose tension is parameterable by the user.

[0084] A visualization of different examples of interfaces uniting different types of objects is illustrated by figures 6 to 9, in which several objects described above can be observed.

[0085] Figure 6 shows an arrangement of 6 areas 2D (601) containing 1 pawn each. This interface could control, e.g., six different filters assigned to one or several sound sources. In this instance the abscissa movement of each pawn in each zone controls the frequency of the filter whereas the ordinate movement controls the quality factor or the width of the filter band.

[0086] Figure 7 shows an example of the control of a synthesizer or of a sampler of a known type. The interface is composed by a tempered keyboard 704 controlling the pitch of the sounds, by a group of four vertical potentiometers 703 allowing the control, e.g., of its dynamic envelope (attack time, hold level, release time). An area 2D (701) containing 3 pawns allows the control, e.g., of effects applied to the sound (reverberation, echo, filters). A matrix of 16 buttons 792 can, e.g., release 16 different recorded musical sequences or also call up 16 prerecorded configurations of the previously described controls.

[0087] Another example of an application of the invention is illustrated by figure 8 showing the control of a device for the broadcasting of different sound sources into space on a device constituted by several loudspeakers. In this configuration an area 2D (801) representing the broadcasting space contains 4 pawns 801 corresponding to four sound sources. Area 2D also contains 5 icons 802 representing the position of five loudspeakers. The level and/or the phase of each sound source relative to each enclosed space is regulated by moving the different pawns 802, which determines its emplacement in the space. Moreover, a group of four linear

potentiometers 803 allows the relative level of each source to be regulated. A unit of four buttons 804 allows each sound source to be activated or deactivated.

[0088] Another example is illustrated by figure 9 that shows the control of a synthesizer or a sound generator according to a configuration different than that shown by figure 7. Here, the frequency of the sound generator is controlled by four virtual strings 903. The initial tension (the pitch) of each string can itself be controlled, e.g., by a linear potentiometer 902. An area 2D 10, e.g., control other parameters of the sound generator such as the output level, the sound quality, the panning, etc.

[0089] Figure 10 shows the control of equipment for audio and/or video editing of a known type. A serrated wheel 1001 allows the rate of reading the audio and/or video sources to be controlled. Status display object 1002 allows the positioning of the reading to be represented according to a format (hour, minute, second, image) of a known type. A set of buttons 1003 allows access to the functions of reading and editing of the controlled apparatus.

[0090] The invention was described above by way of example. It is understood that an expert in the art is capable of realizing different variants of the invention without departing from the scope of the patent.